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TAGS: PREL ETRD GG RS

SUBJECT: GEORGIA-RUSSIA: MUTUAL COMPLAINTS CONTINUE

Classified By: Minister Counselor for Political Affairs Kirk Augustine.
Reason 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) MFA Georgia Office Director Grigoryev told us April 28 that relations with Georgia were "at a dead end," and he did not know how to get them going again. "Some impetus is needed," he said, "but I find it hard to imagine what it could be." He ran through a litany of complaints:

-- Parliament Speaker Burjanadze had "insulted" Russia April 27 ("as she always does," he added), using her speech at the Duma's jubilee in St. Petersburg to complain about Russian support for separatism;

-- "That idiot" DefMin Okruashvili's statement in Kiev April 25 that even "fecal matter" can be sold to Russian consumers -- repeated and expanded on the air in Georgia April 28 -- was likewise an insult (Comment: and may have played a role in the April 26 ban on Georgian mineral water. End comment).

-- FM Bezhushvili had "regrettably" missed an opportunity to mend fences by staying away from the April 21 CIS Foreign Ministerial. He had requested, and received, an appointment with FM Lavrov, but was not given meetings with the Russian Security Council and Presidential Administration that would have made the visit a bilateral one outside the CIS context.

-- The Georgians had made no reply to Putin's invitation to Saakashvili to attend the Presidential Horse Races at the end of July, a visit that might also help mend fences.

¶2. (C) There were, Grigoryev said, nonetheless some areas in which progress was being made:

-- Agreement is close on a consortium to open the railroad from Russia through Abkhazia to Georgia and Armenia; the parties will meet in Moscow in early May.

-- Georgia Border Guards Chief Badri Bitsadze (Nino Burjanadze's husband) had visited his Russian counterpart Vladimir Pronichev in March; their conversation on border security was "one professional to another."

-- DFM Karasin's visit to Tbilisi April 9-10 had been mostly "endless repetition" of Georgian complaints, but DFM Antadze had said Georgia was working on a South Ossetia peace plan. (Karasin also visited Tskhinvali during his visit, and apparently expressed surprise that it looked like "a run-down provincial Soviet town.")

However, none of these small areas of uplift could counter the downward momentum, in Grigoryev's view. "The problems ahead are no fewer than those we've already seen."

¶3. (C) Comment: Grigoryev is usually the most willing of our interlocutors to look for signs of progress in Russian-Georgian relations. His boss, for example -- IV CIS

Director Kelin -- is always more hard-line. Even for Grigoryev, however -- fresh and tanned from a beach vacation in the Emirates, and back in the bright Moscow spring -- the gray clouds almost entirely obscure even the idea of eventually finding silver linings.

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